



July 24, 2008

The Honorable Frank Pallone
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter King
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Pallone and King:

On behalf of Mental Health America, and our nationwide network of over 300 state and local affiliates, I am writing to express our strong support for your bill (H.R. 5268) to temporarily increase federal assistance for the Medicaid program.

Medicaid provides a critical link to needed mental health services for millions of low-income Americans. Importantly, many of the services and benefits that Medicaid covers enable individuals to remain in their homes and communities instead of costly institutions. Without Medicaid, these individuals would have nowhere else to turn in light of the insufficient levels of support available through other programs. Tragically, over half of the approximately 25 million individuals with serious psychological disorders in the U.S. do not receive mental health treatment, with most reporting cost or coverage problems as the main barriers to treatment. Without treatment, serious mental health conditions can often result in unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, and even suicide.

In light of the economic difficulties our nation is currently facing, many more of our citizens will need the assistance Medicaid is intended to provide with accessing health care, including mental health care. But, states will have increasing difficulty meeting those needs without additional federal support. Medicaid is the single largest source of public funding for mental health care, and thus cuts to this program would have a dramatic effect on access to mental health services.

During the last economic downturn, Congress enacted legislation, similar to your bill that provided a temporary increase in federal Medicaid payments. A survey of state officials found that that temporary increase in the federal Medicaid costs helped states ease their budget problems and avoid making severe reductions in their Medicaid programs in 2004.

As Congress considers how best to stimulate our flagging economy, we look forward to working with you to promote your bill and ensure that a second stimulus package includes a temporary increase in the Federal support for Medicaid. Thank you for your continued leadership in support of the Medicaid program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David L. Shern", is written over a white background.

David L. Shern, PhD
President and CEO
Mental Health America